

I support the budgetary increase for MCPL BUT it should be accompanied by better oversight of MCPL and by finding a stronger fundraising partner than FOLMC to raise extrabudgetary support.

1. The increase in budget for Montgomery County Public Libraries (MCPL) is well justified because MCPL is underfunded compared to local peers.

According to the U.S. Government's Institute of Museum and Library Services's annual surveys, per capita operating expenditures in our County in 2019 and 2020 (\$41 and \$39 respectively) were less than half of Washington, DC's expenditures (\$88, \$94) and less than Alexandria (\$50, \$47) and Baltimore City (\$74, \$75). MCPL is chronically (since well before the pandemic) understaffed (especially front-line staff in the branches) (0.4 staff/1000 population) compared to Maryland statewide (0.5, 0.6), D.C. (0.8, 0.9), Baltimore City (0.7, 0.8), and Baltimore County (0.6, 0.5)), each of which have lower per capita income. Yet front line staff have been asked to do more with less over the last two years: to cover new Sunday hours, for instance, and take care of the processing and monitoring of COVID supplies over and above their normal workload. Budget constraints have had other impacts as well. Acquisitions have been curtailed due to budgetary constraints: for instance, physical magazine subscriptions have been cancelled even though the elderly demand them and they bring seniors into the branches. We were told this was due to cost.

2. MCPL is not able to mobilize funds from the public at large.

- Every other public library system in Maryland (as well as DC, Alexandria, and Fairfax County) is operated as a semi-public non-profit with power to solicit donations from the public directly. In addition to having fundraising capacity, the boards of these non-profit library systems are solely dedicated to providing close oversight of their library systems and have the power to change the library director, policies, and budgets. MCPL lacks such dedicated and powerful oversight. Perhaps it's time Montgomery County joined the majority of libraries nationwide in this quasi-public non-profit structure which could not only mobilize additional funds but also ensure more efficiency, greater transparency, and more community engagement. (Many of these systems also have unionized staff).

3. Most libraries also depend on Friends of the Library groups and library foundations for significant fundraising to augment government budgets.

- In our County, the designated fundraising partner, the Friends of the Library of Montgomery County (FOLMC) contributes a pitifully small amount to MCPL - historically less than \$100,000 annually. This amount of donation mobilization is appalling in one of the wealthiest, most educated counties in the Country. In exchange for this small contribution from FOLMC, MCPL provides free office space to FOLMC in the Rockville Library, donates all "surplus library goods" to the organization, and provides space for FOLMC's used bookstore in the basement of the Wheaton Library (for modest rent). Compared to the low level of financial support given to MCPL, this relationship with FOLMC seems uneven. According to the IRS filings and public

annual reports, FOLMC has historically spent about 90% percent of its income on staff and running its bookstores, donating 10% or less of its revenues to MCPL. Basically, FOLMC is a used book sale operation that donates a bit of its profits to MCPL programs. In the rest of Maryland, county-wide Friends organizations are all-volunteer with minimal overhead costs. In these constrained budget times, Montgomery County needs a better fundraising partner to make up the difference between the County budget and the library's actual needs.

4. Until March 2022, FOLMC-affiliated Friends of the Library "chapters" existed in nearly all branch libraries and those Friends groups contributed substantial amounts to MCPL in addition to providing a vital link to the community.

- In 2019, the branch-based Friends of the Library "chapters" contributed more value to MCPL than FOLMC did! Successful branch-based Friends of the Library can truly make a difference: In Fairfax County last year, the Reston Branch Friends of the Library provided \$200,000 to the County library (over and above its contribution to its branch). FOLMC has never contributed that much to MCPL in a year.
- Notwithstanding the importance of branch-based Friends of the Library, in March 2022, FOLMC ordered all branch-based "chapters" to close up shop and send their money to FOLMC. FOLMC was not legally empowered to demand that these mini-Friends (as independent corporations) dissolve but many Friends groups were cowed into complying. Not only was an important source of funding for local libraries lost, but a vital connection between the community and the library as well. The branch-based Friends' presence in the library, the used book sales, the number of volunteers they recruited, and the opportunity for library users to interact with these volunteers all contributed to making the library a vibrant community institution. MCPL has not allowed independent branch-based Friends groups to volunteer in the branches or run used book sales. MCPL claims it is independent of FOLMC and doesn't influence its decisions (notwithstanding adjacent executive offices and personal relationships between staffs) but Montgomery County does have the power to find a better fundraising partner for MCPL.

In conclusion, YES to the budgetary increase for MCPL. **However**, such an increase risks wasting valuable tax dollars if not accompanied by better oversight of MCPL and finding more effective ways to mobilize extrabudgetary support to ensure our library system is as great as this County.

(Currently a study group exists that is examining these areas of concern and we would be happy to share its findings.)